

nering with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to celebrate and preserve our nation's irreplaceable historic and cultural legacy. Applicants had to demonstrate the national significance of their project and assure a match for any requested funds. Carillon Historical Park submitted an application for conservation of the 1905 Wright Flyer III, and our efforts were rewarded on May 19, 1999, with the announcement that our project was one of four projects funded through the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

As Wright Hall evolves into the new Wright Aviation Center, we will refine an interpretive plan and complete a conservation treatment plan

for the restored 1905 Wright Flyer III. We are supported with the professional advice we receive through our affiliation with Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park. This unusual form of private/public partnership benefits not only the taxpayer and the partnership sites, but also the irreplaceable national historic landmark, the 1905 Wright Flyer III.

---

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *NCR World* (September–October 1970): 16.

<sup>2</sup> *NCR World* (September–October 1970): 18.

---

*Jeanne Palermo is Director of Curatorial Services at Carillon Historical Park.*

---

John Donnelly

## Flying Off Rooftops

---

**N**estled in the center of 366 historic acres of the Vancouver National Historic Reserve lies peaceful little Pearson Field; a general aviation field located in the heart of downtown Vancouver, Washington.

For a small general aviation field, Pearson has a lot of ties to both national and international aviation milestones. It is one of the oldest continuously operating airfields in the entire country as its aviation history dates back to a dirigible flight by Lincoln Beachey in 1905. This flight was the first aerial crossing of the Columbia River and the first aerial landing at Pearson.

Fixed wing flying began at Pearson in 1911 when Charles Walsh was the first pilot to build a Curtiss Pusher and fly from Pearson Field on June 15, 1911. The following year, Silas Christofferson became the second aviator to fly from Pearson when he piloted a Curtiss type biplane and made two flights on May 12, 1912. Silas logged over 200 flights at Pearson Field in 1912, but his most famous flight occurred on June 11 in front of a crowd of Portland, Oregon, Rose Festival celebrants estimated at 50,000.

The reason for the large crowd was that Silas was going to attempt the first flight off of a rooftop of a hotel in downtown Portland. In preparation for his flight from the Multnomah Hotel, Christofferson flew the Curtiss biplane to the Waverly Golf Links along the Willamette River just south of Portland where it was dismantled. The plane was then transported to the hotel

where it was hoisted to the roof and reassembled on top of a wooden ramp that was constructed on the hotel rooftop. Christofferson sped down the 170-foot ramp and leaped into the air. He climbed to an altitude of 900 feet while he flew over the Willamette and Columbia Rivers on his way to Vancouver. This was the first crossing of the Columbia River by an airplane.

It was a drizzly day and Silas got lost in the haze. He finally found a moving point of reference to orient himself. "Looking down I saw an object on the water; it did not look more than a foot long, and there was black smoke coming out. That must be the ferry boat from Vancouver to Hayden Island, I thought, and then I knew where I was."

After a 12-minute flight, he landed at the Vancouver Army Barracks at what had been nicknamed "Aviator's Field." Eighty-three years later, Pearson Air Museum re-enacted that historic flight with a Curtiss Pusher replica that was built in 1946. Gaining permission from both the Federal Aviation Administration and the City of Portland, a 200-foot ramp was built on top of the Multnomah Hotel.

Tom Murphy from Hood River, Oregon, was the brave pilot who flew the replica off of the rooftop and traveled to Pearson Field where he landed safely some 26 minutes later. Tom experienced the same drizzly weather for a much longer flight, as he had to avoid the airways of the Portland International Airport. The replica Curtiss Pusher can still be seen in the Pearson Air Museum in Vancouver, Washington.

---

*John Donnelly is the Executive Director of the Pearson Air Museum.*